

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## With the Flying Artillery

On a quiet Sunday forenoon in August, 1862, a few Indians deliberately murdered five white people at a farm house in Meeker County, Minnesota. Early the following morning, August 18th, a large party of Sioux Indians attacked the little settlement at the lower Sioux agency on the Minnesota River in Redwood County. Eight white men were killed in the first onslaught and of those who temporarily escaped seven were overtaken and murdered. On the same day other bands of Indians raided adjacent farms and massacred the settlers — men, women, and children. A detachment of troops from Fort Ridgely, hastening to the scene of the tragedy at the agency, was practically annihilated. Some features of the general uprising of the Sioux nation that followed gave evidence of a preconcerted plan to drive the white people out of Minnesota. While detached bands of Indians moved eastward, killing, burning,



and pillaging, larger forces made determined attacks upon Fort Ridgely and the town of New Ulm which were regarded as the key points to the whole Minnesota Valley. Prompt action by the settlers and troops soon put an end to the bloody orgy, though not until several hundred citizens and soldiers had lost their lives. Congress later appropriated \$1,370,374 to pay claims for damages incurred by the settlers.

From Minnesota the Indians were eventually driven into the Dakotas by militia and United States troops under General Henry H. Sibley. About two thousand were captured during the conflict in Minnesota, of whom three hundred and ninety-two were tried by court martial. Three hundred and three were found guilty of participating in "murders, outrages and robberies" and condemned to the scaffold while sixteen others were sentenced to prison. President Lincoln, after carefully investigating the evidence, commuted the death sentence to imprisonment for all who were not guilty of wanton murder. In accordance with his order, thirty-eight Indians were hanged at Mankato on December 26, 1862, and the remainder were treated as prisoners of war and imprisoned at Camp McClellan near Davenport, Iowa. The last of them were pardoned in 1866.

News of the Sioux uprising caused great alarm among the scattered inhabitants along the northern border of Iowa, some of them having had sad experience a few years before in connection with the Spirit



Lake Massacre. Many left their homes, seeking protection in the more populous regions to the southward. The few farmers residing in southeastern South Dakota and in northwestern Iowa fled to Sioux City leaving their unharvested wheat and growing corn and, in many instances, their household effects.

The Sioux City Cavalry, a militia organization, was immediately called to arms by Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood and units of it were distributed along the State boundary. Lieutenant Colonel H. C. Nutt, aide to the Governor at Council Bluffs, was directed to proceed to Sioux City with three companies of the Twenty-ninth Iowa Volunteer Infantry, then at Camp Dodge awaiting muster into the United States service. At the same time the Council Bluffs Flying Artillery, a home-guard organization which took part in the expedition to the Missouri State line in July, 1861, was directed to send a detachment with one of its cannon to the same point.

At about nine o'clock on the morning of September 4, 1862, the artillery squad, consisting of Alexander Brown, John Strobele, Inglewood Forrest, John Keller, Joseph Ross, Ervin Dodge, John Horsky, J. T. Papps, S. S. Jamison, Jr., and myself, with Thomas Clifford, Conrad Reiser, and George W. Robinson as teamsters, left Council Bluffs under the command of Sergeant George Fairman, acting as captain, and marched to Lewis Butterfield's place on the right bank of the Boyer River near



where the town of Loveland now stands, about eighteen miles from the starting point. Here the squad encamped for the night.

The march was resumed at an early hour on September 5th, in rain that had been falling nearly the whole night. The outfit lumbered along over muddy roads across the Boyer River bottom, passed the site of the present city of Missouri Valley (then known as the McIntosh farm), trudged on through the old town of Calhoun in Harrison County, skirted the bluffs to Soldier River, and thence floundered on through the deep mud to Little Sioux on the right bank of the river of that name, about thirty miles from Butterfield's. There camp was made almost in the center of the little village.

This was the most mosquito-infested place I ever saw. Notwithstanding smudges maintained all night and the liberal use of oil of pennyroyal the men were unable to sleep because of the pests. Just at daybreak the camp was thrown into a hullabaloo by an excited citizen attempting to pass the guard line in hot pursuit of a member of the company who, he said, had stolen one of his chickens. After many words of affirmation and denial, Captain Fairman paid the enraged citizen fifty cents for the alleged stolen fowl and he was pacified. After his departure Inglewood Forrest and I halved the bird and each toasted his portion at the end of a willow stick over the camp fire and devoured it for breakfast.

Soon thereafter camp was broken and the march



toward Onawa in Monona County was begun. Our bay horses were converted into roans by the white wings of the mosquitoes that covered their bodies. That was the hardest bit of travel experienced on the expedition. The trail led over the Missouri River bottom land for the entire distance and the mud, though not deep, was as sticky as glue. Accumulating on the wagon wheels and gathering the prairie grass like a rolling ball of soft snow until it came in contact with the wagon body, the tough heavy mass formed effective brakes which had to be chopped away with axes. We arrived at Onawa, twenty-five miles from Little Sioux, late in the afternoon and pitched our tents in the public square. In a short time the national emblem was flying from the top of the village flagpole.

About ten o'clock that night three or four of the men stole out from camp and went on a private foraging expedition to a large barn about a mile from town, from which they returned later with a fine turkey hen and a half dozen chickens. On their return trip these fellows had the scare of their lives. When they were half way back to camp they heard behind them the thudding sound of the hoofs of many galloping horses. Immediately came to their frightened minds the thought of painted warriors riding to a night attack upon the camp. Leaving the road they concealed themselves in the high grass and awaited the passing of the band. The hoof beats came nearer and nearer, the hearts of the



listeners were in a flutter as the troop drew nigh, and then there passed a herd of some forty or fifty loose horses, apparently out for a night joy run. Greatly relieved, the boys went on to the camp and passed the guard with the improvised countersign, "Turkey and chickens".

On September 7th we left Onawa at daybreak and marched about forty miles to Sergeant Bluff, where the night was spent. At a noon bivouac a portion of the foraged poultry was consumed and the remainder disappeared during the supper hour that evening. The night was clear and cool so that it was a pleasure to roll up in our blankets and sleep in the open.

As the end of the journey was near we did not break camp the following morning until rather late. We marched along the bluffs to the Floyd River, on the outskirts of Sioux City, where we were met by Sergeant Samuel H. Casady, of the Sioux City Cavalry, with a squad of his men, a small brass band, a drum and fife corps, and a detachment from the infantry. Thence we were escorted through lines of huzzaing citizens and refugees to a camping place on a hill overlooking the town and the stockade which had been constructed on the lower ground at Pierce Street between Second and Third streets. No small military body was ever more enthusiastically welcomed. Our march of more than one hundred miles was ended and we were ready to meet whomsoever might come against us.



The stockade or corral was about three hundred feet square. The walls consisted of two-by-ten cottonwood planks nailed both on the outside and inside of four-by-four studding and the space between filled with Missouri River sand. The walls of the stockade were pierced with loopholes for small arms. At each corner of the enclosure was a tower several feet square with the sides loopholed for musketry or rifle fire. It would not be a very effective defense in these days of high-power arms, but apparently it was sufficient to afford protection against bow and arrow or the guns at that time possessed by the Indians.

In the center of the stockade was a high, one-story building, probably forty by eighty feet in dimensions, constructed of cottonwood boards an inch thick, around the sides of which were built rows of double bunks for sleeping purposes, while above them was a floor upon which riflemen might stand in case of attack and fire from loopholes overlooking the outer walls of the corral. Also within this building were water wells, cooking appliances, food and fuel, and several long tables. Outside, yet within the stockade, was space sufficient to accommodate temporarily a large number of domestic animals in case of emergency.

The population of Sioux City at that time consisted mainly of the old-time French traders and former attachés of the North American Fur Company, some of whom were quite well off in worldly



possessions. A few days after our arrival a complimentary banquet held in the Emergency Building was attended by many of the leading citizens and the visiting soldiery. A large quantity of most delicious food was served with unlimited supplies of imported French wines. The flow of the latter was too generous because, in some instances, it was quite overpowering.

Although we had an hour of artillery drill each forenoon and another hour of musketry drill in the afternoon, time soon began to hang heavy, inasmuch as all of our squad were business men or mechanics unaccustomed to hours of idleness. Visiting the city became a favorite pastime when permission could be obtained. Discipline was not very strict, however, and sometimes men took leave without the formality of asking. Occasionally they went fishing in the Missouri or Big Sioux rivers and the catfish and pickerel caught by them afforded a welcome relief from the regular rations furnished by the State contractors.

After we had been in Sioux City a week or more our artillery squad was invited to a barbecue at a big ranch, several miles out in South Dakota. Sergeant Casady's scouts having reported the coast clear in that direction, Captain Fairman accepted the invitation. The owner of the ranch had been a fur trader in the earlier days but had retired and was then engaged in the cattle business, running his herds loose both summer and winter in the river bot-



toms where nature usually provided ample feed the year round in the form of rushes and other hardy vegetation. He owned upward of two thousand head, so he informed us, but rarely, if ever, saw them all at one time. He and his six half-breed Indian sons gave the cattle such care as was deemed necessary, one of the principal tasks being to provide salt for them about once a month. On the occasion of our visit a "salting" was demonstrated. Coarse salt was scattered from the tail gate of a wagon on the high bench land just beyond the ranch buildings. A man in the wagon blew a long tin horn and the cattle by hundreds came running with tails up, cavorting on the way, and bellowing loudly. They licked the salt from the ground which had been cleared of grass by burning, and returned to the brake when their craving was appeased.

There were seven residence buildings on the ranch situated close together in a semicircle, a number of large barns, many haystacks, and a corral in which there were a number of horses, chiefly Indian ponies. The middle house was flanked on either side by three smaller houses. In it, a two-story structure of logs, lived the proprietor, while in the others his sons resided. The elder ranchman had several Indian wives and each of the sons had at least two. The number of small children running about was beyond easy estimation.

The barbecue was in the open air and consisted of a yearling steer roasted over a pit of live coals,



many vegetables, coffee, tea, chocolate, milk, and unstinted quantities of imported claret, the latter being drawn from the cask and served by girls of the families from ordinary half gallon and gallon measures. After the feast we did some practice shooting with our old smoothbore six pounder for the edification of our host and his numerous family. The target was a large barn door set up about six hundred yards from the firing stand. Two solid shot were fired which struck near the target and then, with a charge of grape, the old door was shattered to pieces.

Returning to the city in the late afternoon we discovered a great number of large turtles basking in the sun on driftwood just below the bridge over the Big Sioux River. The temptation to try their skill with revolvers was too great for the boys and a fusillade was fired at the turtles. Arriving at camp we learned that our cannon fire and revolver shots had been plainly heard in the city and that the citizens, supposing we had been attacked by Indians, were in a panicky state of alarm.

One morning soon after our return from the barbecue one of our men received a slight gunshot wound. The muskets used by the sentries the night before were stacked in front of the tents and the boys were skylarking about while awaiting the preparation of breakfast when Alexander Brown seized the bayonets of one stack at arm's length and lifted



the three guns from the ground. The butts swung together, one of the hammers struck, and, "Bang", there was an explosion. Brown deliberately set the muskets down and quietly remarked, "Well, I have played hell!" Examination disclosed that the tip of his second finger had been shot away and his hand slightly burned. That was the only casualty suffered by a member of the squad while on the expedition.

The defeat of the Indians at the battle of Wood Lake on September 23rd made it impossible for them to inflict further harm and removed the cause for apprehension among the people, so we were ordered to return to Council Bluffs. We left Sioux City early in the evening of September 26th and drove to the Whiting farms, several miles east of the present town of Whiting in Monona County. There we encamped for the night. On the following evening we arrived at Calhoun in Harrison County. Early in the forenoon of the twenty-eighth (Sunday) a number of citizens, some of whom had never seen a cannon, assembled at our tents, and at their request a shot was fired at a target some four hundred yards away. It was a solid round shot and tore up the side of the hill just above the target. During the following summer the cannon ball was found in the valley beyond the little ridge against which the target had been placed. It had probably ricocheted over the top, but many persons insisted that it had passed



through the hill. Soon after exhibiting our marksmanship we proceeded on our way and arrived at Butterfield's about noon.

Captain Fairman purchased some chickens from Mr. Butterfield, and it was decided that the easiest way to catch the fowls, after designation by the owner, would be to remove their heads with bullets. The writer, then being considered an expert in handling a revolver, was detailed as executioner. While these arrangements were in progress John Keller was talking at the front door of the house with the district schoolmistress who was a boarder there and who had shown her skill at shooting by defeating him in a revolver match on our northward march. The chicken shooting immediately attracted their attention. Now the head of a lively feeding chicken is not the most stable target and misses will occur even at short range. Such was the case in this instance, whereupon the "schoolma'am" remarked to Keller, "Why, I can shoot better than that." So without consulting me they arranged a match.

The revolver which I was using was an ordinary heavy Colt six shooter, which I had possessed for a long time and the "dog" of which had been so shaped by filing as to render it very light on the trigger. It was used on this occasion, and the privilege of leading off was accorded to the challenger. She raised the gun to aim when a bystander interrupted to give her instruction. She dropped her arm to her side, the gun at full cock and her finger



in front of the trigger. There was an explosion and her lawn dress was set on fire. The bullet pierced her foot at the joint of the second and third toes and buried itself deep in the hard trodden earth. A messenger was sent for a doctor, some two miles away, who finally came and dressed the wound.

Notwithstanding the accident we had a fine chicken dinner. Our squad left Butterfield's about five o'clock in the afternoon and reached Council Bluffs about nine that night, having returned from the point of reputed danger much more rapidly than we had advanced.

We had engaged in no battles, and the only Indians we had seen were the women and children on the ranch and a half-breed Indian stewardess on board the steamer *Shreveport* at Sioux City. One result of the expedition of the Council Bluffs Flying Artillery, however, loomed large in the life of the writer. With the wounding of the "schoolma'am" at Butterfield's there began an acquaintance between myself and Juliette M. Younger which rapidly ripened into a warmer feeling. We were married at Magnolia in Harrison County, Iowa, on December 19, 1863, and have "lived happily ever after" during the sixty-one years that have elapsed since that event.

CHARLES H. BABBITT